



# CORE VALUES: A SPIRITUAL APPROACH FOR NEW DENTAL PROFESSIONALS

Dr. Surekha Rathod<sup>1</sup> | Dr. Jaishree Chahande<sup>2</sup> | Dr. Usha Radke<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor, Department of Periodontics and Implantology, VSPM Dental College and Research Centre.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Prosthodontics and Implantology, VSPM Dental College and Research Centre.

<sup>3</sup> Professor and Head, Department of Prosthodontics and Implantology, Dean, VSPM Dental College and Research Centre.

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Health professionals usually have low morale & burnout. Core values are the foundation of the spiritual approach. Knowing and living by our values enriches our self-development and leads to an understanding of the purpose of our lives. Values in health care programme are based on three principles viz., physician heal thyself, learning through experience and relevance to work.

**Material and Methods:** An introduction to the theme, warm up followed by structural programme and activities was started with 2 minute meditation followed by a 2-hour lecture on core values, ethics and professionalism and a small group discussion. The students were asked to think of the values that reflected from them, songs, poems, quotes, books and images and a feedback form was duly filled.

**Results:** 95 % participants believed that moral, ethics, honesty, consciousness, positivity, punctuality, kindness, hard work, creativeness and truthfulness added orientation focus and enhanced team work. All 100% participants believed that it built team spirit, creativity, truthfulness, compassion, positivity, honesty, motivation, co-operation and punctuality.

**Conclusion:** The present study revealed a positive learning behaviour among values in health care towards personal and professional level. Dental teachers should engage students more effectively in orientating them to the essential values needed in dental practice and contribute towards building a more effective and proactive dental health service to the society.

**KEYWORDS:** core values, spirituality, professionalism.

## INTRODUCTION

We already know that low morale & burnout are prevalent in health professionals. There are some values statements produced by professional bodies but to make them read they are to be owned at a personal level first and then integrated into work place. An exploration of what values mean to us personally and how they apply to our life is the foundation of the spiritual approach. Knowing and living by our values enriches our self-development and leads to an understanding of the purpose of our lives. It is the key to bringing meaning to our lives and raising morale. (Brown, 2003)

Being able to provide good clinical care is fundamental to becoming a doctor. This objective should guide a student's behaviour in both their clinical and academic work. Students should reflect on how they can support and promote good clinical care as part of their dental education.

Coming into 21<sup>st</sup> century we were aware of growing consensus about inseparable link between mind and body; yet spirituality still remains at best a mystery at worst for health professionals. Many of us feel that spirituality could be expressed through thoughts, feelings, attitude and actions.

In 2002 authors designed values in health care programme on three principles. (Eagger, 2005)

1. Physician heal thyself
2. Learning through experience
3. Relevance to work

1. **Physician heal thyself:** The professional care giver is placed at the centre of healthcare delivery, with the emphasis on self-care and personal development, in order to raise morale and restore a sense of purpose.
2. **Learning through experience:** Values are best understood through facilitated, experiential learning, rather than didactic instruction, with time for reflection and sharing in a supportive environment.
3. **Relevance to work:** The learning experience should be relevant to participants' work and lives, with an emphasis on reflection, action planning, evaluation and a commitment to ongoing learning.

In the health care professions there are many different methods used to teach the skills and the art of each discipline. Such as formal lectures, personal study, tutorials and practical experience are used alongside apprenticeship learning. Author stated that to teach values, adopt a spiritual approach. The teaching needed to be

in small groups with the exercises mainly experiential, personal and at a deep level. He felt meditation and visualisation to be essential, as is the need for deeper reflective and listening exercises. He used 'Appreciative Inquiry' as a method of adopting positive attitudes and felt that spiritual approach is essential. (Bradshaw, 1997)

Reflection is a mental process of cyclic thoughts that allows self-examination and internal exploration of issues and concerns triggered by experience. It functions in self-regulation of personal values and behaviour resulting in changed conceptual perspectives. (Mamede & Atkins, 2004)

Various principles and values stated in numerous oaths and declarations form the basis for ethical practices in health care. The Hippocratic Oath is but one of these many oaths and declarations that have been recited by entering and newly graduated physicians and dental professionals over the centuries. (Orr 1993, Sritharan 2001, Hurwitz 2004, Rancich 2005)

### Amended definition of dental professionalism from RCP, 2005:

Dental professionalism signifies a set of values, behaviours and relationships that underpins the trust the public has in dentists. Dentistry is a vocation in which a dentist's knowledge, clinical skills and judgement are put in the service of protecting and restoring oral, dental and social well-being. This purpose is realised through a partnership between patient and dentist, one based on mutual respect, individual responsibility, and appropriate accountability.

In their day-to-day practice, dentists are committed to:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Altruism
- Continuous improvement
- Excellence
- Working in partnership with members of the wider healthcare team.

These values, which underpin the science and practice of dentistry, form the basis for a moral contract between the profession and society. Each party has a duty to work to strengthen the system of oral and dental healthcare on which our collective dignity depends, within the context of a realistic economic framework that will permit the extension of this system to all those in need both now and in future. (McSherry, 2011)

The core values were based on caring, compassion, integrity, competence, confidentiality, responsibility, and advocacy. Any educational programme aim to support and develop the personal wellbeing of health care practitioner rather spe-

cially focus on improving their clinical skills, through some exercise like meditation, visualisation, listening, reflection, appreciation, creativity, playfulness (Brown, 2003), so in our institute we attempted the workshop related to values in dentistry. There is very little data on the dental student's personal beliefs, values and goals in life. Also, the published reports have very limited access on the use of reflection. It was assumed that the personal beliefs, values and goals in a professional's life begin from the earlier trainings; also, the experiences along the way may change these personal values. Knowing these personal values during training would provide the students an opportunity to readjust their core personal values and teachers to influence their students. Hence our aim was to explore human values in depth and include an educational activity that promotes self-esteem and emotional intelligence of students.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was approved by institutional ethics committee of our institute. All investigations on human subjects had obtained their informed consent and participant's anonymity was preserved throughout the life. This study was conducted at our dental college with BDS students entering their internship posting in 2017. Workshop begins with an introduction to the theme and warm up followed by structural programme and activities. Some are actions and some are reflections. The activity was started with 2 minute meditation, a 2-hour lecture on core values, the ethics and professionalism was delivered. The lecture included a large-group, informative presentation on the definition, importance and principles of biomedical ethics and core values in dentistry with emphasis on ethical problems in clinical practice. The last 30 min of the lecture was a small group discussion how to use core values at work place. At the beginning of the workshop, students were informed about the study and explained about the exercise.

It includes:

1. Think of the songs you love. What values are reflected through the words and music? Write them down.
2. Think of poems, quotes, books that are important to you. What values are reflected in them?
3. What images are important to you? Think of your favourite scenes, views, paintings or perhaps statues. What values and feelings do they evoke?

After the above introduction, students were given 3–5 min to reflect and write down their thoughts at the beginning of the lecture. Students were given another 10–15 min to use these core values and draw picture and complete their written reflections. Written reflections included only the student's age, gender and ethnicity. At the end we asked them to fill feedback form. All questions were open ended and based on inner core values in health care.

## RESULTS:

A total of 65 participants were included in this study. The responses obtained are tabulated in Table 1 and represented graphically in Figure 1.

**Table 1: Responses by the participants for Questions**

Question Number	Percentage
1	69%
2	92%
3	95%
4	100%

69 % participants mentioned rejuvenation, felt enhanced communication skills and positive outlook towards life.

92 % participants believed that they learnt introspection highlighting positive and negative qualities of self, learnt listening really changed the things, hidden good inner values, increased confidence and positivity towards life.

95 % participants believed that moral, ethics, honesty, consciousness, positivity, punctuality, kindness, hard work, creativeness and truthfulness added orientation and focus in enhanced team work.

All 100% participants believed that it built team spirit, creativity, truthfulness, compassion, positivity, honesty, motivation, co-operation and punctuality.

In this study, the majority of participant underlined their intrinsic motivation to become professionally competent dental practitioners and their positive attitude to enhance their professional growth through inner core values.

## DISCUSSION:

Care as well as competence are the two pillars of good medical practice. Present study discussed the experience of various activities in the workshop through sessions. Omit 100% respondents showed interest in learning about various aspects related to inner core values in health care that can be implemented into the practice i.e. positive thinking, communication skills, ethics, moral, etc. A key finding

was that the participants viewed activity as an effective and growing tool for long term personal and professional development. The Spirituality and Spiritual Care Rating Scale (SSCRS) (McSherry, 2011) was used to explore nursing faculties' understanding of the terms spirituality and spiritual care. The findings showed that participants had very strong beliefs about spirituality and its intrinsic value to patients. (McSherry, 2011)

The ethical responsibility to provide access to care as part of professionalism is explored and several suggestions for positioning dental education to enhance the public service side of professionalism are presented prior, during and even after admission to dental schools. All three areas hold possibilities for dental education to instill and advocate for the public service aspect of professionalism. (Nancy, 2005)

The importance of promoting ethical behaviour in dental students is reflected in the emphasis on formal ethics teaching within the curricula of most dental schools. In addition, future needs in dental ethics education are explored including the importance of addressing the unique aspects of the dental education environment. (Trathen, 2009)

The study approaches captured student's written reflections on their core values in becoming a dentist. The data obtained also provided a snapshot of compassion of these personal values of interests.

Participant's reflections suggested the universality of positive intentions and purpose of life. Students were striving to improve in their study; to gain more knowledge and become smarter.

Some reflections showed that the past hurts from colleagues. These negative feelings were not usual at workplace.

Literature pointed out that learning through the reflection process can lead to change in behaviour.

Encouraging reflective learning using personal journals recording has been found to help students integrate learning from different sources.

Critical reviews also showed that the cognitive and affective skills were necessary in reflection. Reflections may be used as a learning tool to develop these skills in professional courses for the students.

## CONCLUSION:

Present study revealed multiple responses regarding their professional and personal development plan. It included learning of combined aspects like inner value, communication skills, career planning etc. It indicates positive learning behaviour among values in health care towards personal and professional level.

It also builds self-esteem and renews a sense of purpose in healthcare system. Consequently, improving patient care and reversing the trend of deteriorating the morale, ethics and burn out among staff and students. Dental teachers should engage students more effectively in orientating them to the essential values needed in dental practice and contribute towards building a more effective and proactive dental health service to the society.

## LIMITATIONS:

The students' personal values in life were gathered through self-report but the verification was not possible. However, as the responses had been collected anonymously it was believed that students' responses were not skewed toward socially desirable responses. However, generalising the study results is possible when the domains of the populations are similar.

## FUTURE PROSPECTS:

To know the core values for new dental professionals through this type of spiritual approach should be the routine activity and must be included in healthcare curriculum in internship; so that new healthcare beginners serve the society whole heartedly and spiritually.

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